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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001026

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SA/INS AND PRM/ANE  
LONDON FOR POL/GURNEY  
NEW DELHI PLEASE PASS TO DAS DCAMP  
CAIRO FOR CHEYNE  
GENEVA FOR PLYNCH  
NSC FOR MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/26/2014

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [BT](#) [IN](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: BHUTANESE REFUGEES: HISTORY STARTS TODAY

REF: A. A. KATHMANDU 758

[B](#). B. NEW DELHI 3117

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Janet Bogue for reasons 1.5 (B,D).

Support for the End Goal

[1](#). (C) We appreciate the perspective, based on personal experience as well as scholarship, brought to the history of the Nepalese Bhutanese refugee problem by Embassy New Delhi (REF B). The roots of the present imbroglio are deep and complex. What the Government of Bhutan describes as legitimate steps to safeguard a vulnerable culture against illegal immigrants and pro-democracy agitators appear to many foreign observers (including this mission) as unjustifiable ethnic persecution and expulsion of nearly a sixth of the kingdom's population. The history of the Bhutanese refugees is subject to varying interpretations, but is less important than what the U.S. Government, the Governments of Nepal and India, and the international community can do to solve it. We agree with Delhi that "we are working towards the same goal: a durable solution" and support Delhi's multifaceted and forward-looking strategy. The following are our comments on New Delhi's prescriptions.

Begin Equitable  
Repatriation Without Delay

[1](#)2. (C) We agree that the USG should press the RGOB to begin repatriation of Category 1 "Genuine Bhutanese" refugees as a first step. In addition, the verification process in other camps should be accelerated in a transparent manner and the appeal process should be reinstated. The Joint Verification Team (JVT) took eighteen months to "verify" the approximately 12,200 refugees within Khudunabari Camp and determined that only 2.4 percent of the population met the JVT's criteria for Category 1. Such a small proportion of involuntary emigres is belied by all independent assessments, and can be justified only in the context of reported assurances by the RGOB to the Nepalese Government that Bhutan plans to accept both Category 1 and 2 refugees, which together constitute over 72 percent of the Khudunabari Camp's inhabitants. The USG should urge the RGOB to clarify its intentions regarding Category 2 refugees and state them publicly. The USG should also garner international support for the re-opening of the appeals process to correct flawed JVT determinations that often separate minor children from their parents and render others "stateless."

Need for Specific, Written  
Terms of Repatriation

[1](#)3. (C) The USG should engage with the RGOB on the need to provide detailed, written information on the terms and conditions for repatriation. Such specific issues as citizenship, land ownership, shelter, employment, language, education, and security must be addressed. Confidence-building mechanisms could include public radio broadcasts and/or internet dissemination of terms of return and the RGOB's authorization of a small group of refugees to conduct a "pre-repatriation" visit to examine conditions of return first-hand. This approach has been very successful in other refugee situations. The USG should continue to highlight the role that international organizations already active in Bhutan (such as ICRC, UNDP, WFP and UNICEF) can play in facilitating re-integration into Bhutan society and economy. We believe, however, that the UNHCR's unique mandate and capabilities would be invaluable in implementing and legitimizing the repatriation process.

Direct Dialogue

[1](#)4. (C) The USG should encourage direct dialogue between the RGOB and refugees. However, recent events suggest that there should be a neutral party present to facilitate the dialogue,

keep the discussion constructive and on track, and ensure the credibility and sustainability of the process.

#### Strengthen USG Diplomatic Efforts

15. (C) The USG should strengthen our diplomatic efforts on two fronts:

-- As New Delhi suggests, we should "take the lead in organizing a coordinated effort" to make it clear to the RGOB that the international community, including Bhutan's major donors, expects RGOB to honor its responsibilities as a member of the UN in solving the refugee problem according to international standards, preferably with UNHCR's involvement.

The USG might be able to rejuvenate the coordination within the "Friends of Bhutan" group, urging its members to use their collective influence and offer their collective resources to persuade the RGOB to repatriate a substantial portion of the camps' residents, and thus prevent the camps from becoming the breeding grounds of political radicalism.

-- We hope that New Delhi will agree that the USG should encourage the new Government of India, given its unique influence in Bhutan, to take a more proactive role to resolve a problem that threatens to become a source of political unrest, and possibly terrorism, in India, Nepal and Bhutan. We agree fully with a UNHCR official from Geneva, who recently visited Kathmandu, that India holds the key to any satisfactory settlement of the refugee problem. Fortunately, the signals that Natwar Singh's MEA has been sending to Kathmandu suggest that issues of security in the Himalayas are being accorded high priority in New Delhi. We will look for further signals during Singh's visit to Kathmandu this week.

BOGUE